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DOT 9-11 AWARDS UPDATE

This Flag Voice contains information on a wide range of issues related to the DOT 9-11 Medal and the DOT 9-11 Ribbon. I recognize that there's a considerable amount of disappointment and frustration associated with not having a sufficient supply of medals and ribbons to provide the timely recognition our hardworking people certainly deserve. This Flag Voice should help explain how we got where we were at and what we're doing about it.

In recognition of the actions taken by many DOT/Coast Guard employees and private citizens in response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Secretary of Transportation approved a series of DOT personal awards in early 2003. Based on the criterion approved by the Secretary, the Coast Guard provided DOT with a preliminary estimate of several thousand for what was then regarded to be a likely quantity of initial-issue medals and ribbons. However, once the final eligibility lists were assembled by the Areas in January 2004, it became apparent that the Coast Guard's overall need was more than ten times the available supply provided by DOT. All totaled, the Coast Guard will ultimately distribute more than 35,000 9-11 Medals/Ribbons. Needless to say, this poses a significant challenge.

Under normal circumstances, the Coast Guard would simply requisitioned the additional Medals and Ribbons from the military stock system. However, because the design and procurement of these awards were managed by DOT outside the normal military procurement process as a one-time procurement without a provision for the long-term maintenance needs of a military organization, there is no current supplier for the Coast Guard. Additionally, even if there were a commercial supplier available, continuing to operate outside the military awards systems would preclude these awards from being integrated into the larger military awards hierarchy and being readily available through the federal stock system and private companies specializing in ribbon and medal mounting. The bottom line is that we must integrate these awards into the military system.

The first step in the integration process is to develop a military-quality specification and to produce sample award sets to be used in the follow-on contracting phases. As is customary in cases like this, we have contracted the services of the Institute of Heraldry and have already evaluated the preliminary samples. We expect to evaluate and approve the final samples and specification in the coming weeks. Once these samples are approved and the specification is in hand, we'll begin the contracting phase. In an effort to expedite production, we are exploring the possibility of using DoD contracting services that are routinely involved in award procurement. Otherwise, we will contract for these awards independently. Creating a new military award is a significant undertaking, that is seldom initiated by the Coast Guard because most new medals and ribbons are sponsored by DoD. All considered, this process is expected to take at least six additional months.

Because of the unique circumstances surrounding the creation of these awards, we are waiving some of the normal requirements associated with personal awards as indicated below.

Based on feedback from the field, I know that many qualified members are concerned by the earlier classification of this award as a personal award and the impact that this may have on their eligibility for another personal award predicated in part on their actions following 9-11. The issuance of these 9-11 awards will not preclude the issuance of another personal award for the same time period.

While the original 9-11 Ribbon did not include a lapel pin, we have incorporated suitable lapel pins into the military specification for both the 9-11 Medal and Ribbon. This is particularly important for our civilian employees who were involved in 9-11 actions.

Standardized DOT certificates will ultimately be provided to each award recipient. Effective immediately, copies of the standardized award certificate need not be included in officer OERs. However, the award shall be annotated in the OER as is customary for all personal awards. For enlisted personnel, there are no advancement points associated with either award.

The Areas continue to judiciously manage the distribution of their limited supplies and to maintain an accurate listing of all eligible members, along with those who have already received their award. Prior to shipping additional supplies to the Areas, my staff will contact the Areas for an up-to-date requirements count/list. Should operational tempo at the time preclude Area management of the distribution effort, I will explore other alternatives for direct shipment.

It goes without saying that the introduction of these awards into our military inventory would have been much smoother if we had been in a position from the beginning to follow the standard military procedures. However, because that was not the case, we are making every effort to take the appropriate steps consistent with the long-term needs of the Coast Guard and qualified award recipients. I will provide updates on this issues from time to time as we reach critical milestones.

Many of you have requested Coast Guard specific eligibility information regarding the new Global War on Terrorism Medals. We are working closely with our DoD counterparts, and will provide policy in the coming weeks.

Regards,

RADM Kenneth T. Venuto
Ken Venuto

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